Health of Home and School

LEAFLET NO. 5.

Issued by the State Department of Health of Maine.

The teeth and their care.

The state department of health issues this leaflet because this matter is so closely related to health and welfare.

Bad effects of diseased teeth.

The work which the teeth and mouth should do is a very important part of the work of fitting the food for the nourishment of the body. Aside from the desirability of reducing the food to minute particles, a sufficient prolongation of the act of chewing is necessary so that the finely ground food may very thoroughly be mixed with the saliva. One important function of the saliva is to change the starchy elements of the food into maltose, a kind of sugar. Unless it is so changed, it is not made available for the nourishment of the body. If diseased teeth are sore or tender, chewing will not be well done; if many are absent, it cannot be properly done, and indigestion and its attendant ills may result.

But that is not the whole story of the evil results of having bad teeth. Bacteria of dangerous disease-producing character are often found in the mouth. If they find there a lodgment, they multiply and produce their poisons. In the cavities of diseased teeth and about the tartar that adheres to the teeth they do find lodgment where they generate their poisons in abundance. They not only give the mouth a foul odor, but the poisons which these bacteria form are absorbed into the system from the mouth and from the stomach, and the bacteria themselves often penetrate farther into the tissues of the mouth, or are distributed through the circulation of the blood. The experience of physicians and dentists has forcibly focused their attention upon the fact that this gradual absorption of poisons from diseased teeth—this slow poisoning—is a frequent cause of ill health of serious character, and that in most cases there is a rapid improvement in health after the teeth and mouth are put into a more healthy condition.

Again, diseases of the teeth often extend to the gums and the jaws, and from those new sources there is sent out other purulent supplies with their accompanying bacteria. While this is only a partial enumeration of the ills of diseased teeth, it should suffice to emphasize the fact that a healthy mouth filled with sound teeth is well worth working for.

The growing of good sets of teeth.

This is in good part work for the mothers. Foundations for them are made or marred to some extent by the food which children receive. But, aside from the question of nourishment for the teeth, there is a question of their proper use and exercise. Exercise is just as necessary to the proper development and healthful maintenance of the teeth and the tissues into which they are set as of any other part of the body. But, in these days of breakfast foods and mush, there is a superabundance of soft foods and not enough requiring vigorous chewing, so the teeth, the jaws, and the mouth fail to develop properly and to maintain their normal condition, thus unsightly irregularities of the teeth result. There is reason to believe that the evil effect of insufficient chewing extends even to the anterior and posterior nasal passages and may have something to

do with the presence of troublesome adenoid growths which are often the cause of mental backwardness in children.

The temporary teeth.

It should not be thought that, because the temporary teeth are not to last for a life-time, it makes but little difference whether they are well cared for or not. If they are extracted or lost prematurely the adult jaws do not properly develop and the permanent teeth are likely to be crowded and irregular, thus being unsightly and subject to early decay.

The cause of the loss of the teeth.

Heredity and prenatal influences have something to do with the durability of the teeth, as does the food of the child during the formative period of the temporary and permanent sets. But the exciting cause is chemical action due to faulty care of the mouth and teeth. Particles of food remaining on or between the teeth ferment or decompose and form acids. These acids, acting pretty continuously in badly-cared-for mouths dissolve the structure of the teeth, and after a while the nerve pulp is exposed, and then follows the full train of symptoms, pain, ulceration, abscesses, loss of teeth, etc.

For the want of care, the teeth may also be lost by the accumulation of tartar and the resulting inflammation of the gums and absorption of the sockets of the teeth. The teeth may also be injured by the use of foods which contain too much acid, or by injurious tooth preparations.

How to save the teeth.

From early childhood the habit should be formed of giving the teeth regular care. With a tooth-brush and water, and preferably tooth-powder the teeth should be cleaned carefully and thoroughly. Use a tooth-pick, a soft, smooth one, only when it is necessary to remove particles which cannot otherwise be easily removed. Clean the teeth the last thing before bedtime, and again in the morning. Clean the mouth and teeth thoroughly after every meal if possible.

How to use the tooth-brush.

The brush with bristles of uneven length is best. Rinse the mouth first with water, then use the brush with water alone. A tooth-brush and water with no tooth-powder of any kind cannot wear well-formed teeth. Use a tooth-powder (described later) only once or twice a day. Brush all the surfaces of the teeth, especially the backs of them and the spaces between them. In brushing the teeth the gums should not be avoided; moderate friction helps to keep them healthy.

The kind of tooth-preparation to use.

There is reason to be shy of many on the market. Better ask your dentist, or be on the safe side and use nothing but some precipitated chalk or magnesia so finely powdered as to be entirely without grit. This may or may not be flavored with one or more of the aromatic oils, cinnamon, sassafras, peppermint or oil of wintergreen.

When to see the dentist.

Do not wait until filling or extraction is necessary. Arrange with him to examine your teeth at least twice a year and to advise you. It is better and cheaper for you to enlist his services in the prevention of trouble rather than to wait and give him the larger operations which will be harder for you and cost more.